Užkandis

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Užkandis

by justheretoreadhannibalfics

Summary

Will Graham has terrible luck. This is the second village that has decided to sacrifice him to the entities that live in the woods. Those creatures that are only appeased by such a treaty. He escaped the last one without being et, but he's not sure he's going to be that lucky this time. The wolves are out, and they are hungry.

Notes

I apologize for any mistranslations with the Lithuanian. I'm still learning the language, and might not get everything right.

1

Will strained against the ropes until they bit into his skin, and he felt blood weep out of his wrists and ankles. He was frustrated with himself, because Hobbs hadn't even tied them that well, so he should have been able to escape easily.

Part of the problem was he was trembling slightly in fear.

Will heard the first howl of the hunting pack, and his teeth clamped down on the gag in his mouth. That was another thing that wasn't helpful. If he didn't have a mouth full of dusty cloth, and his hands weren't tied behind his back, he was sure he would have gotten loose by now. Even with the shaking.

Will pulled harder, even though he knew the smell of blood would draw them more quickly. He refused to try screaming through the gag, because the sound would also draw them.

Will rolled over, a little bit away from the log he had been left against, looking for anything sharp he might be able to use to cut the ropes.

The area he was in was frustratingly bare of such useful things. If he had more time, he knew he would have been able to figure something out, but he really just didn't have time. They were already close.

Will had tried to conceal a knife on himself, but that was one place where Hobbs hadn't failed, and it had been found. So Will had no tool.

Something caught Will's eye, and he said a silent prayer of thanks, even though he seriously doubted the existence of any god.

There was a branch on the log, and it looked like it might be sharp.

Will managed to maneuver himself back to the log, and get his hands to the branch. He was kneeling, now, and could see over the top of the log to look around.

The moon was full and bright as it rose higher in the sky, and it gave enough light for Will to see his surroundings. He didn't see any wolves yet, but he knew they were coming.

Will knew the offerings didn't always die quickly or quietly. He had heard screams from the woods once or twice, but he seemed to be the only person bothered by it. Everyone else acted as if nothing had happened. As if those people had never lived in the town with them.

That was how they would be acting about him, now. Forgetting him on purpose.

Will thought it was sort of funny, that he had been picked this time. He had come to this town to avoid almost the exact same situation. Only, there the selection hadn't been random. The people of the last town had wanted to get rid of him. This time his name had literally been drawn from a hat. It was as if the universe wanted him dead.

Maybe there was a god, and they just hated him.

But he had no intention of letting the universe, or any god there may be, have its way. He had escaped last time, and he was going to do it again.

The rope snapped, and his hands were free. He huffed a laugh through his nose in his delight and quickly tore the gag from his mouth before he got to work on the rope around his ankles.

Another howl startled him, and he glanced around nervously. It was much closer than the last one had been, and Will knew he didn't have long. He wasn't going to get a head start.

The moment his ankles were free, Will was off, bolting into the trees. He knew he was leaving a scent trail, and possibly even a trail of blood from where the ropes had cut him, but he didn't have time to worry about that.

Several barks rang out behind him, and Will knew his escape had been discovered. He really didn't have much of a lead.

But he still thought he could manage. Wolves can't climb trees, but Will was excellent at it.

Will found a tree with sturdy enough branches and immediately scrambled up as high as he could. When he looked down, Will looked directly into the eyes of a large, tawny wolf. The wolf's eyes were a deep crimson color, almost black in the moonlight.

Without taking its eyes from Will's, the wolf let out a howl. It was loud, deep, and powerful, resonating in Will's bones and making the tree he was clutching onto tremble.

Immediately, more wolves appeared, circling the tree and looking up at him.

Will was panting from exertion, but the trembling of his own limbs had stopped. He held eye contact with the first wolf defiantly, daring it to come after him.

The wolf tipped its head curiously, and Will could have sworn it looked amused.

One of the other wolves made a low sound in its throat, drawing the attention of the tawny away from Will. A few barks and grumbles were exchanged, as if they were actually having a conversation with each other. It looked like an argument, if they were. Will wondered about them. Everyone knew they weren't regular wolves, that's why this entire truce worked. But Will didn't know how smart they were, or how different from regular wolves.

Will clutched the trunk of the tree, trying to calm his racing heart. He had escaped them for the moment, but he knew he wasn't nearly in the clear.

Will closed his eyes, hoping it would help. The smell of the pine was pleasant and grounding, and it actually did make him feel better.

"Noriu valgyti."

Will's eyes flew open, and he looked down where the wolves were.

But something was wrong. There were still a few wolves, but there were four people standing in their midst. Will didn't recognize the language they were speaking in, but he could see that one of them was apparently disagreeing with the others.

The man's hair was the same tawny shade as the wolf Will had seen before, and his eyes the same startling shade of red. His face looked like it could have been carved from stone, noble and stern.

They were all wearing flowing clothes, reminding Will of togas or something, each of a different color. The tawny man was wearing one of blood red that matched his eyes in the moonlight.

Were these the wolves? Could they transform into people? Or were they people who could transform into wolves?

"Jis mano gimininga siela. Aš turiu tai padaryti. Aš tau gaminsiu."

That had been the tawny man, speaking to the group as a whole, rather than responding to the one who had spoken before.

"Viena salyga," one said, wearing a dark brown tunic, "niekas tau nepades. Tavo namu ukus mokykla. Paskutinis sprendimas."

The tawny man looked up at Will, and the moment their eyes met he knew they *were* the wolves. There was something animal in those eyes, wild and dangerous.

The man smiled before turning back to his companions and saying something in that strange language. He spoke so fast Will couldn't really determine where the gaps between words were.

Whatever he said seemed to frustrate his companions, who threw their hands up in the air with exasperation. They conversed for another minute or so before the one in blue brushed his hands together in a gesture Will recognized. 'I wash my hands of it'.

Then, they were gone. All the wolves and people vanished into the trees around. All except the man in red.

He looked up at Will once more, and Will had to fight to hold his gaze. It had been easier when Will had thought he was only a wolf. Animals were easier to work with.

Knowing they were also human renewed Will's fear as well. He didn't like most people, and most people didn't like him.

"Labas vakaras. Kaip laikotes?" the man said, and Will frowned. It had sounded like a question, but he had no clue how to answer it.

He shook his head.

"I don't understand you." he said softly, not sure the man would even be able to hear him.

But the man nodded and stepped to the side so he could see Will better. It made Will uncomfortable, but he refused to show it.

“I asked how you are,” the man said.

Will furrowed his brow. There was something oddly pleasing and sensuous about the man’s voice, but Will thought it might be due to it clearly not being his native tongue. His voice was rich and accented, gentle but somehow carrying all the way up to him.

“I’m doing wonderfully,” Will snapped back, “I could stay up here forever. I think I’ll just make myself at home.”

The man laughed, and despite himself Will felt inclined to smile with him. The sound was nice, especially to Will’s frayed nerves.

“I promise not to harm you,” the man said, and Will snorted, “I can smell that you are bleeding. If you come down I can help you.”

Will huffed a derisive laugh of his own.

“Like hell I’ll come down,” he said, “I’m not a fool, wolf. I got away from you at first, but you’re planning to wait me out to kill me. I’d rather die of starvation up here.”

The man only looked amused in the face of Will’s defiance, which made Will nervous. As if the man knew something he didn’t.

“You did not understand the conversation I just had with my companions, but let me explain that I have asked that you not be killed.”

Will pressed his lips together, unconvinced and suspicious. It didn’t make any sense that the man would have done that. It was probably a trick to get him out of the tree.

“If that’s true, why don’t you come up here to help me?” he asked, taunting, “Like I said, I like it up here, and I don’t feel like leaving. I assume you can climb a tree in that form, can you not, wolf?”

The man seemed to consider it for a moment, watching Will curiously.

“I thought you would feel better believing you are safe from me where you are,” the man said, “but if you would prefer it I can certainly climb up to you.”

The man paused thoughtfully.

“Though, it is likely to be uncomfortable and inconvenient for both of us if I attempt to clean and bandage your wounds in a tree.”

Will chewed the inside of his cheek. Unfortunately, the man was right, and Will didn’t really like the idea of staying in the tree all night regardless. His feet were bare, and his ankles and wrists stung badly from the cuts of the rope.

And there was sincerity in the man's voice. Not the kind that could easily be faked, but rather the kind that was born from objective reasoning. The man was telling the truth because he had no reason to lie. If he wanted to kill Will, he would simply climb the tree after him and throw him out or something. There was no need for sleight of hand or trickery. The man believed he could easily kill Will when he wanted to, but was actively choosing not to.

Wasn't that just perfect? Will felt drawn to the man, if only to find relief for his pain, and he wanted to trust him. But it was dangerous to trust him. Will knew the man could change his mind at any moment and decide to kill Will anyway.

What choice did he have? He could either climb down now and deal with the consequences, or he could wait until his exhaustion made him too weak to hold on and he fell from it instead.

Will was tired, and his adrenaline was gone. He was crashing from the fear he had felt, and he wanted to rest.

But he wasn't about to give up. He was escaping the pack of wolves, and he didn't intend to give himself over if he had any choice in the matter. He wanted to show them they weren't all powerful. They couldn't just do what they wanted.

"You're gonna have to be more convincing than that," Will told the man, "I'm not in the habit of self-destruction, and I'm not foolish enough to take you at your word."

At that moment, a wolf emerged with a bundle, walking directly up to the man. The man took the bundle, speaking softly to the wolf in that strange language. After a moment of this, the wolf left again, and the man turned to look back up at Will. He studied Will for a long time, pensive and considering.

"My name is Hannibal Lecter," he said at last, and Will nearly let his jaw drop.

Supposedly, names held great power for creatures of magic. If that was really his name, the man was offering Will something he could use to defend himself or hurt Hannibal.

That was pretty damn convincing.

Will closed his eyes, sighing through his nose and setting his forehead against the trunk of the tree. He had the impression the man might not wait very long for Will to dither over it. He might set out to climb up the tree regardless. Then, Will would be in even hotter water.

And he hadn't even asked for Will's name in return. If he had, it wouldn't have felt so significant.

Slowly, Will pulled away from the tree trunk and began to climb down. The man below didn't say anything as Will began his descent.

2

Will found his muscles were all aching from his earlier fight. He had strained hard against the ropes, then run for his life, then climbed up a tree, all without rest. He had been holding still for the past little while, so his muscles felt they had room to complain.

Will couldn't help a soft groan as he sat on the lowest branch, leaving his bare feet dangling. The man was a few yards away, probably in deference to Will's desire to have some distance between them. He didn't approach as Will settled himself, but he was watching closely.

Will's ankles were raw and red, and the few scabs that had tried to form had cracked during the climb down so they were weeping blood again. They hurt badly.

"Alright," Will said, waving the man over, "you can do my ankles first."

The man smiled and walked over carefully, as if approaching a wounded animal. Will thought that was funny, given the circumstances.

"So you may be able to run the moment you feel it is both necessary and possible?" Hannibal asked.

Will offered his own wry, tired smile.

"Just so," he agreed.

Hannibal opened the bundle he had received from the other wolf, and Will saw there were bandages and a jar of something. Will could see now that he had been wrong about the clothing he was wearing. It wasn't a toga or even flowing much. It was simply a long coat tied with a belt. It had looked different from so high up and far away.

Hannibal gently took one of Will's feet in his hand, making Will wince as the movement agitated his sore muscles and raw skin. Hannibal glanced up at Will's face briefly before getting to work, muttering what sounded like an apology under his breath in that strange language.

The man cleaned Will's cuts with a wet rag, then dipped his fingers into the jar and spread a pink salve over the cuts. He was surprisingly gentle and soft, making Will grow more anxious as time went on.

"Why are you doing this?" Will asked after a while, as Hannibal began to slowly wrap his ankle with the long strips of bandage.

Hannibal's hands paused for a moment in their motions, his eyes flicking up to Will's face once more.

"Man reikia taves," he said, "I have never seen anyone climb a tree to escape the party before. You are the first to successfully evade us."

Will scoffed.

“So, you spared me because I’m the first somewhat intelligent victim?” he asked.

Hannibal smiled again.

“That is certainly part of it,” he said, “though there are several reasons. I thought that one would make the most sense to you.”

Will hummed, then hissed a sharp breath in as Hannibal’s thumb pressed against his cut a bit too firmly.

“Care to tell me a few of the other reasons?” he asked.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow at him, but he looked amused more than anything.

“You trust that I will tell you the truth?” he asked.

Will considered that.

Hannibal could tell him anything if he thought it would serve his purpose. For all Will knew, he was only bandaging him up so they could have the fun of a real chase before eating him. Will doubted that was it, but he thought Hannibal had some kind of angle.

Maybe it was his turn for a gesture of good faith.

“My name is Will Graham,” he said.

Hannibal looked surprised, then smiled and offered a hand for Will to shake.

“Aš esu pamalonintas susipažinęs su tavimi,” he said.

Will didn’t know what language it was yet, but he thought he understood what that meant just fine.

“Pleasure’s mine, I’m sure,” he replied, shaking Hannibal’s hand, again wincing as the action disturbed his injuries.

Hannibal’s smile brightened, and for the first time it showed his dangerous, sharp teeth. Rather than being afraid, Will was instantly fascinated. He felt inclined to entertain the notion of going along with Hannibal’s wishes, just so he could learn more about these wolf-human hybrids.

“Very few who are offered are clever and determined enough to escape their bindings,” Hannibal said, reminding Will of their conversation topic like a bucket of cold water, “even fewer have the presence of mind to remain silent. If I ventured a guess, I believe you were disappointed that you began to bleed, solely because you knew the scent would attract the hunt.”

Will bit the inside of his cheek, not daring to confirm that. He was curious about what else the man might guess about him. He didn't want to interrupt.

"You have shown intelligence, strength, courage, and determination. Even once your only options were to wait us out or accept my offer of help, you refused to give in. You understood that your escape was only temporary, but you were resolute. Even now, you have not entirely removed yourself from the tree, likely because you plan to use it as an escape if the others return unexpectedly. I imagine you plan to kick me away and retreat back into the branches at the first hint of trouble."

Again, Will didn't answer. Hannibal was right again. It was slightly unnerving how well Hannibal was predicting Will's thoughts and decisions.

Hannibal looked up at Will and smiled again.

"No need to worry, Will," he said, "I imagine you are far less predictable when you are not afraid."

Will set his jaw and shoulders defiantly.

"I'm not afraid," he lied, but it sounded like the truth.

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh, then leaned forward so his nose nearly brushed the stubble on Will's jaw. Will refused to pull away or move. He wouldn't show him fear that way. Hannibal inhaled, and Will felt his heart skip a beat.

Was Hannibal smelling him?

"You are afraid," Hannibal restated, "I can smell it. You hide it admirably, though."

Will tensed, preparing to kick the man away despite his aching feet. But Hannibal pulled away and finished binding Will's other foot.

The terrible truth was that Will was afraid. He was always afraid. His mind was never quiet, and he was constantly filled with fear of his own thoughts. No matter where he was, or what was happening, Will felt as if he could die at any moment.

That might have been a good thing for tonight, because he was used to thinking while he was near a state of panic.

"May I please see your hand?" Hannibal asked, holding his own hands out as if offering to help a child down from the tree.

Will hesitated only a moment. He thought he could actually trust Hannibal, at least for the time being. Hannibal was using medicine and bandages, and Will got the feeling he wouldn't be doing so if he planned to kill him. He would see it as a waste of supplies.

Will unclenched one hand from the branch above him, and held it out to the man. His fingers ached, and he realized he had been holding on too tightly, his muscles tense and unyielding. Just one more thing adding to his soreness, he supposed.

Hannibal took Will's hand gently, rubbing small circles into it to ease the ache. Will flinched, unused to the intimate kind of touch this was, but refused to pull away.

"You should be careful with your hands, Will," Hannibal said softly, "touch is how we give emotional context to the world. You have a fine, strong pair of hands, and you would do well to care for them."

As Hannibal spoke, he turned Will's hand over, revealing that he had cut it in several places. In Will's fear and hurry, he hadn't even noticed. At once, he felt himself flush with shame. He was actually proud of his hands on a good day. He liked to know he was capable of good, honest work, and thought his hands were a fine show of his ability.

But it was absurd that this man should make him feel ashamed. He had cut them because he had been fighting for his life. Because of Hannibal and the pack.

Hannibal had moved on, apparently not too caught up in the comment that had entirely captivated Will's mind. He was carefully cleaning each cut, letting it dry, then spreading the salve on. His progress was slow, careful, and methodical. Will found himself captivated watching the man's confidence and grace in even this small act. As if he was very familiar with it.

"What language is it you speak with the others?" Will asked, not knowing he was going to ask until he heard the question leave his mouth.

He didn't even have a moment to wonder if that was the wrong kind of question to ask before Hannibal answered.

"Lithuanian," he said simply, "My native tongue. I was born there."

He didn't seem at all uncomfortable telling Will this, though Will thought it was something most people would want to keep to themself. Not because of shame, but because it was personal, and every time they said it aloud to someone it felt like giving a piece of themself away. People who always spoke their native tongue unless it was necessary not to took secret pride in their heritage, but didn't often air it out for others to cast judgment upon.

At least in Will's experience.

"What brought you here?" Will asked, wondering how far Hannibal would let him go before clamming up and refusing to talk about his past anymore.

But Hannibal didn't seem in the least perturbed by Will's question.

"There was a conflict in my home country, and it was no longer safe for us. We traveled here in search of sanctuary. What we found was freedom, but it came at a price."

Will tipped his head. Did Hannibal mean they had been cursed to be wolves after they came here? How had that happened? Or did he mean something else entirely? Will had no way of knowing, and would just have to wait for Hannibal to elaborate.

The man glanced up at Will again, his eyes catching a dappled beam of moonlight and reflecting it in gold rings the way the eyes of animals did. It struck Will that he was at a terrible disadvantage if he did have to run. This man was as clever as could be, and had all the physical prowess of a predator.

“We were no more safe here than we were where we had come from,” Hannibal continued, and Will listened carefully, “but we had the advantage of being unknown.”

“People fear what they do not understand,” Will said, understanding clicking into place inside his skull as he considered the kind of position Hannibal’s pack had been in.

Hannibal nodded, his eyes sparkling with pleased amusement.

“Just so,” he said, “we established our own community, with the few of us that were left, but we had to protect ourselves from the frightened towns near us.”

Will understood. They had been left few choices, one of which had been simple surrender and death. They had refused that option, and taken one that offered to bestow them with their own power.

The sacrifices.

But Will couldn’t imagine they had originally demanded human lives. That would have inspired outrage and backlash.

“Then what changed?” he asked.

Hannibal had finished with Will’s hand, and was now just holding it gently in both of his. He was smiling sadly.

“You truly are a bright man,” he said, “may I have your other hand?”

Will unclenched his other hand and allowed Hannibal to begin working on it. He flexed the hand already bound, finding the salve had made the small patches of skin around each cut slightly numb, so it no longer stung. The soft massage had eased the ache in his muscles as well.

“A trap was laid for us, and we had become too trusting that the town would do nothing to anger us. They slaughtered many of us, including my family.”

Will was amazed. After all that, Hannibal still managed to show this gentleness to him, a member of the race that had done that to him.

“I am impressed you did not raze the town, as well as all others in the vicinity,” Will said honestly.

Hannibal looked up, stopping in his work as he studied Will’s face. Perhaps he was looking for a trace of judgment or mockery. Eventually, apparently finding none, he resumed his task.

“I nearly did,” he confessed, “my blood had been tainted with hate. There are still days where I find the idea appealing, and I must use all my strength to refrain.”

Hannibal went silent, simply treating Will’s hands. Will watched him curiously, finding it easier to look at the man when he was otherwise occupied. He was incredibly striking in appearance, and Will would have even called him handsome in a devastating, dangerous way.

“What stops you?” Will asked after a long moment.

Hannibal smiled, but did not look up at Will this time.

“I think some things are best left as mysteries. At least for now, Will. I have told you a story, and I would like to know how it is you came to be in this place and in these conditions.”

Will considered that, unsure if he wanted to tell Hannibal anything about himself.

What eventually convinced him was the smooth and soft drag of Hannibal’s fingertips over his own skin. He felt both trust and trustworthiness in that touch, and he wanted to feel it.

“I wouldn’t have even been in this town if the last one hadn’t tried this same trick,” he explained, “I have a way of making people dislike me, and in that town the sacrifices are chosen. I had managed to avoid it for years, but I finally tripped up and angered the wrong person.”

Hannibal had finished with Will’s other hand, and now was holding both of them. Now, Will was the one staring down at their entwined hands while Hannibal stared at him.

“I managed to escape, with a lot more of a head start than I had this time. I ran, and ended up in this town. I couldn’t believe it when my name was drawn. What are the odds?” Will smiled bitterly, and was surprised when the fingers curled around his own squeezed gently, as if reassuring.

Will flicked his eyes up at Hannibal for only a second, but it was long enough to see the strangely gentle expression there. It frightened Will, because he didn’t understand it.

“I didn’t have a chance to run before tonight, this time,” Will continued, clearing his throat, “maybe everyone tries to run. Maybe they could just tell I was going to. But they caught me, found the knife I had tried to hide, and you know the rest.”

Hannibal nodded, and Will felt as if some kind of spell had been broken. He was suddenly able to breathe deeper and look up at Hannibal with only a semblance of his previous anxiety.

“So, what now?” Will asked.

Hannibal considered it for a moment.

“I don’t imagine you have any great desire to return to the town that treated you thus,” he said.

Will chuffed derisively.

“You’d be right,” he said.

Hannibal nodded again.

“Then I would like to invite you to accompany me to my home.”

Will frowned. Despite the gentleness Hannibal had shown him to this point, Will had expected that to be the extent of their interaction. He thought they would part ways now, one way or the other. He hadn’t prepared himself for the possibility Hannibal would offer him anything else.

The thought that it could be a trap was there, in his mind, but it was quiet and unconvincing.

“Alright,” he said.

3

Hannibal smiled and helped Will down from the tree, just like a child, as Will had pictured earlier. It left them standing chest-to-chest, just for a moment, letting Will see that Hannibal was just a bit taller than him, and to feel the heat radiating off his body. Then, Hannibal pulled away, probably so he wouldn't make Will feel trapped.

"Would it make you uncomfortable if I change forms?" Hannibal asked, tipping his head curiously, "It would be better."

Will felt a shard of fear cut through his chest, imagining the large, tawny wolf jumping at him, lunging, tearing.

"That's fine," he said.

The look Hannibal gave him seemed to say his fear had been noticed and noted, but then there was no longer a man there. Just a large, tawny wolf with eyes like blood in the moonlight.

The wolf form was larger than Will had been able to see, larger than he would have guessed. The ridge of its back came up to his shoulders, leaving the wolf towering over him, much taller than the man had been. Will felt another rush of fear, fighting the urge to protect his throat which felt far too exposed and near those large teeth and claws.

The wolf, Hannibal, seemed to be aware of Will's reaction, and lowered its head. When those red eyes left Will, he felt his muscles ease. He didn't feel as if he was being hunted so much anymore.

Will took a step towards the wolf, noting the way its ears twitched at the sound of his footsteps. The wolf didn't move, allowing Will to approach.

Will was standing just by the wolf, able to feel the same warmth glowing out from the strong body, when Hannibal leaned toward him and pressed his neck against Will's shoulder.

Will didn't know how Hannibal had known, but that contact broke the tension he had been holding in his body. He wasn't afraid anymore. Or, at least, not as much as he had been.

"Lead the way," Will said, and Hannibal lifted his head.

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Will didn't know what he had been expecting, but the well built and established village took him by surprise. The houses were small, and some element of their construction was foreign, probably because they were made by Lithuanian natives, but otherwise it could have been a town anywhere. The only real difference were the inhabitants.

Everyone seemed to be up and about, despite it being the middle of the night, and at least half of them were in wolf form. Young wolf pups chased the other children around, and human parents called to them both while wolf parents scooped up the pups by the scruff of their necks.

Everything seemed so natural and normal, and Will really felt that he was the outsider in this place.

Many of the adults called out to Hannibal as they passed, either speaking in Lithuanian or barking, depending on their current form, and Hannibal barked his reply. They seemed to be able to understand the barks regardless of form, and that fascinated Will.

But he had little energy for fascination. He was physically and emotionally exhausted, and just wanted to sit down for a bit.

Eventually, Hannibal led Will to the door of a house that was set slightly apart from the others. It was no more or less grand than the others, but there seemed to be a different aspect of care to it. It looked more well-kept.

Hannibal was a man again, and studied Will curiously as he opened the door.

“This is my home,” he said, “Please, come in and have a seat.”

Will nodded tiredly, grateful for the chance to rest his feet. The walk hadn’t been long or particularly difficult, but it had only added to his pain. He sank into one of the chairs next to the table, sighing heavily and closing his eyes as he felt his feet rejoice.

“I suppose this means you don’t plan on killing me,” Will said, still not sure he really believed he was safe with the man and all those other wolves.

Hannibal moved around busily, and when Will opened his eyes he saw the man was heating water to make tea.

“No, I have no intention of killing you. My fellows may not agree with me, but I do not think you pose any significant threat to us, and I believe you are worth much more to us alive.”

Will chuffed.

“That makes me feel a lot better,” he said wanly, “I don’t dare even ask what use I might be to you. I dread to think.”

Hannibal smiled warmly, glancing up at Will from his task. Will couldn’t help but feel there was something else going on that he had no way of knowing. Something big, but secret. Why else would the other wolves agree to let Hannibal keep Will as some sort of experimental pet? Even help him to care for Will’s wounds?

What on earth was going on?

“If I were to tell you at this stage, I have great doubt as to you believing me,” Hannibal said.

That made Will more curious, but also more anxious.

Hannibal set a cup of tea on the table beside Will.

“Drink. You are dehydrated and exhausted. This will help with both problems.”

Will picked up the cup and sniffed cautiously. It smelled like fruit and honey. He took a sip, trusting Hannibal hadn’t brought him all this way just to poison him.

It was delicious. Like something from a fairytale. It reminded Will of stories of the fae, how a taste of their food would leave you unable to eat regular food for the rest of your life. He wondered if that would happen, or if his hunger and thirst had just heightened his sense of taste and made something good seem better.

Regardless, he sighed happily and wrapped his fingers around the small cup, letting the warmth soak into his chilled skin.

“This is wonderful, thank you,” He said, and saw how that pleased his host.

“I imagine you are also hungry,” Hannibal said, moving about the house with grace and direction as he gathered things, “while I have not the time to make you a proper meal, I have something you can eat tonight and I’ll cook for you tomorrow.”

Will offered a wry, grateful smile.

“S’long as it’s not made of anyone I knew, I’ll eat it,” he said, feeling more tired now he was really able to relax. His eyelids felt heavy, and he wondered if it was the tea or just exhaustion.

Hannibal smiled, and his eyes sparkled with amusement.

“Šaltibarščiai has no meat or animal in it, Will,” he said, “so you can be fairly certain it is safe.”

Will nodded, smiling. At least there was that. Hannibal wasn’t feeding him a person. At least not tonight.

“I get the feeling you’d like to tell me all about whatever it is you’re about to feed me,” he said drowsily.

Hannibal turned, a bowl in hand. He looked surprised by Will’s words, but not upset or offended. Will thought he just seemed fascinated. Hannibal set the bowl on the table, and Will was surprised to see the contents were bright pink.

“What is it that gives you that impression?” Hannibal asked.

Will lifted the spoon and stirred a slow circle in the pink soup. It smelled sweet, but had something savory in it as well.

“Is my impression wrong?” Will asked, feeling a bit more awake in the face of food. Hannibal shook his head, so Will shrugged. “Then it doesn’t matter much how I tell. I wouldn’t mind you talking. Give me something to think about other than how narrowly I avoided death tonight.”

Hannibal considered it for a moment before nodding lightly.

“Šaltibarščiai is a traditional dish from Lithuania. It is cold soup made of beets. That is what gives it this color.”

Will nodded and took a mouthful of the soup. It was indeed sweet, but he tasted something giving it a tang as well. Complimentary flavors. It was good. Hannibal continued talking, his voice a pleasant tide smoothing Will’s jagged thoughts and nerves. The soup was rich and filling, and Will found he was even more tired once his belly was full.

Hannibal pulled Will to his feet and gently led him to the bed in the corner of the house. Will tried to protest, feeling like he should, though he couldn’t think any solid reason for it. He was too tired. Hannibal only smiled and shook his head.

“I have no use of it tonight, and you must be well rested for what comes tomorrow. Sleep, Will, and gather your strength.”

Will fell onto the bed and was instantly drifting.

“Myliu tave, mangusteli,” Hannibal said softly, spreading a blanket over Will.

Will didn’t have time to wonder what those words meant before he was asleep, and oblivious to the whole world.

—

Will leaned against a tree, gasping for air. He glanced around himself, seeing nothing but the dark. The dark of the trees and the dark between the trees, indistinguishable from the dark that was something lurking in the trees.

Will’s heart was pounding in his ears, but he was sure he could hear them out there. His pursuers were clever and quiet, but fear heightened the senses, and he knew they were there.

A branch snapped behind him and Will whirled around.

Shining out from the darkness were hundreds of eyes. Each pair were a fiery golden yellow light, shining at him like lanterns, or souls of the dead. He could hear low voices, growling and threatening.

Will turned back around to run from them again, but he found there were blazing eyes in every direction. His heart was pounding, and he turned and turned, looking for any escape. He clenched his fists by his sides, feeling pain as the action opened the healing cuts there.

He was trapped. There was no way out.
The eyes moved forward, closing in.

Just as they grew close, the clouds overhead parted and the moon lighted the whole world. It threw Will's pursuers into stark relief, revealing faces and hands all too familiar to him.

Hobbs and Jack were there, and Stammets and Budge. All people Will knew. People he had tried to cohabitate with. Some of them were people who had scared him from the moment he had met them. Others were people he had liked, and had hoped would stand by him in the end.

All of them were people who had been calling for his blood when he had been chosen as a sacrifice.

Will turned, looking for any way out.

There was no break in the wall of people. Strong hands gripped at Will and pulled him against the tree. He fought, screaming and begging as he was lashed to the trunk, and he caught sight of a glittering blade.

"This time, you won't be getting away," Hobbs growled lowly, "I hope the wolves tear you limb from limb. I hope you feel every moment of it."

Then, the knife was plunged into Will's stomach, tearing through him and spilling his organs out onto the forest floor. The air was filled with the scent of warm blood, thick and metallic.

4

Chapter Notes

> It's been a hot minute, hasn't it. I'm sorry this fic is taking so long. The daunting task of the language is making me anxious. I always take on projects that are so ambitious, and eventually I'll pull it off. I just can't promise it will be quick.
> Sorry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will jerked awake and immediately met a pair of glowing red eyes at the foot of the bed, set in the face of a large wolf.

Will fell out of the strange bed, shaking and gasping for air so he could scream. But it felt like someone had taken his lungs in their hands and was squeezing. His heart was beating so hard he expected his chest to explode with the force.

“Will.”

Hannibal was a person again, kneeling in front of Will and grasping his shoulders firmly. His eyes flashed red again, but Will wasn’t frightened of him anymore.

“Will, can you hear me? Just nod if you cannot speak.”

Will nodded, trying to unlock his chest so he could take in a breath. His lungs were burning with a need for air.

“Good,” Hannibal said, and he actually looked a bit relieved, “do as I say, now.”

Hannibal raised a hand and held it beside his own face.

“Follow my hand carefully, Will,” he said softly, almost a whisper, “watch closely.”

Hannibal moved his hand from one side to the other, passing it in front of his face before drawing it close to Will’s nose and then letting it drop.

“Can you breathe now?” he asked.

To Will’s surprise, he could. While his focus had been on that strange task, his chest had loosened and his breathing had started back up without him even noticing.

“Yes,” he managed, though his throat was sore and he wondered if he had cried out in his sleep.

Hannibal nodded and offered a warm smile.

“Good. I am sorry if I frightened you when you woke. I heard you become restless and meant to see you were not unwell.”

Will nodded, pulling his knees up to his chest and setting his head on top of them. He swallowed hard and listened to his heart as it gradually slowed.

“I’m sorry,” he said softly after a moment, “I didn’t mean to wake you. And I’ve been making you worry. Did I, um, do anything while I was asleep?”

He was afraid he had said something, or screamed loud enough for others to hear.

Hannibal ran a hand through Will’s hair and hummed softly. Will wasn’t used to anyone touching him, especially with such gentleness. He didn’t know how to react, but he didn’t move in case it would make Hannibal stop.

“You sounded as if you were in distress, but there were not any recognizable words. You did thrash a bit, and that is how you tore the bindings from your hand.”

Will lifted his head and saw that Hannibal was right. His left hand was now bare to the world, and a few cuts had reopened. They were bleeding sluggishly, and he wondered if that had been the blood he had smelled in his dream. He had no way of knowing.

“Do you regret letting me live, now?” Will wondered aloud, “I’ve come and gotten blood everywhere after you showed me kindness.”

Hannibal cupped Will’s jaw and tipped his head up so their eyes met. It wasn’t bad to meet his eyes now. He didn’t look angry or upset.

“Will, if you believe I am going to regret sparing you, you are mistaken. I have promised I would be responsible for you, and I always keep my promises.”

Will swallowed again. Hannibal hadn’t made that promise to Will, he had made it to the other wolves. After having only just set eyes on Will, he had been prepared to face every challenge that entailed.

“Why?” Will asked again, “I don’t understand why you would do that rather than just kill me.”

Hannibal smiled warmly and took Will’s hands gently in his. He didn’t seem to mind that Will’s blood smeared onto his fingers as he did.

“Come, let me wrap your hand again,” he said, “I will make you another cup of tea to help you settle.”

Will stood and reluctantly went with Hannibal to the table. Hannibal had him sit again as he gathered his supplies and put some water on for more tea.

“Starting on the morrow,” Hannibal said softly, applying more of the salve to Will’s hand, his eyes flickering in the light of the candle, “you are to learn to live here. I will teach you of our culture and traditions, and you will begin to learn our tongue. I will find more comfortable sleeping arrangements for the both of us, though I do not expect you will be provided an entire house for yourself until the others have come to accept you.”

Will wasn’t sure how he was expected to react to that. He was entirely aghast by it all, unsure how such an idea had been thought of or had been agreed on.

Most of all, he was confused why anyone would think he was worth all that work.

“Why?” he asked, feeling like that was the one word he would find himself repeating many times in the near future.

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh as he wrapped Will’s hand in fresh bandages.

“That is the price of your life, Will,” he said, “and while it seems like very little compared to your worth, I still wish I could promise you will find it easy.”

Will didn’t say anything as Hannibal finished, then stood to pour the tea. This tea smelled different, richer and more full bodied. It was a comforting smell, despite not being familiar. It was like sitting by a fire while the wind blew cold outside the house.

That was the first thing that made Will think he would like to live here, to learn to live like them.

“Will you turn me into a werewolf?” Will asked.

Hannibal looked at Will, surprised and briefly confused. After a moment, his features smoothed with understanding and he took a seat facing Will.

“We are not werewolves as you understand them,” he said calmly, “we have met such creatures, and it has helped us better understand the general opinion of them. We are Vilkatas, and to become one is entirely your choice. Though, children of two Vilkatas do seem to always be born with the gift.”

Will considered that. Hannibal called it a gift. And it was entirely by choice. Will didn’t have to worry if he was bit or scratched by any of them. And everyone had chosen it, except the children.

What really convinced Will, just then, was how happy everyone had been. As he had walked down the little road with Hannibal, everyone had been in a state of picturesque happiness. It was like those magical fairy villages in old stories.

“Okay,” he said, nodding, “okay.”

Will took a drink of the tea, which was perfectly warm without burning him. Hannibal looked at him with a clear expression of satisfaction. He was pleased Will was coming to see things as he did.

The tea was delicious, though strange to Will, and he began to feel his eyelids droop as he finished it. Only then did it occur to him that Hannibal must have added something to it to make him sleep. He hoped it would keep the dreams away rather than trapping him inside them.

Hannibal once more helped Will to the bed and made sure he was comfortable. This time, however, he pulled a chair over and sat by the bedside. Will looked at him in confusion through his drowsy daze, and Hannibal just smiled.

“I will watch over you as you fall asleep,” he said, “would you like me to tell you a story?”

Despite how strange the entire situation was, Will liked the idea of falling asleep to Hannibal’s voice. Hannibal’s voice was low and gentle and soothing. Will found it oddly comforting.

“Please,” he said softly, letting his eyes drift shut.

Hannibal began, “seniai, labai seniai, mano šeima buvo per šalta, per alkana, per pavarges.”

Will drifted off with the strange yet soothing words in his ears, washing over him.

—

Will was sitting beside the stream. The water ran coolly by, just past his feet. He could stretch them out and get them wet if he wanted. For now, he was fine where he was. A cool breeze ran fingers through his hair, and the sun kissed his skin gently.

Will recognized it was a dream, but that didn’t matter. For the first time in a long time, he didn’t feel afraid. He took in a deep breath, tasting the fresh air of a day in early autumn.

“This is a beautiful place, Will.”

Will turned and saw a large tawny wolf. He recognized it at once as Hannibal, and it was strange to see him in the light of day.

“Thanks,” Will said, turning back to look at the water running by. He saw a few small fish dart through the ripples of water. “It’s where I grew up.”

Hannibal, in his wolf form, nodded in Will’s peripheral vision. Will considered asking if it was really Hannibal, somehow entering his dream through some kind of Lithuanian wolf magic. He didn’t, because any answer would be unreliable. If he still cared to ask after he woke up, he could ask the man himself, to his face.

But that didn’t mean Will was about to go spilling his entire life story to the wolf in the dream either. If Hannibal wanted to know, he could ask in the daytime as well.

So they sat in comfortable silence for a time, watching the water run by and feeling the warm sun. It was so relaxing, Will never wanted to leave. He wondered if this would be what it was like after he died. He liked to imagine death was just an eternal dream. If he was right, this

was the dream he would like to enter when he died. He had never felt more safe than when he was here.

After a time, Will stretched his legs out and dipped his feet into the water. The cold shocked him, but it was also good. Just like he remembered. He smiled and swished them around a bit, wondering why the cold hadn't woken him up. Shocking sensations like that usually would wake someone from a dream. It was curious.

The wolf moved, drawing Will's attention. It shifted closer to the stream, almost as if inspecting it. Then, hesitantly, the wolf dipped his front paws into the water. Will watched, slightly bewildered. It was like watching a child try a new food.

The wolf laid down with both his front paws in the water, and his tail gave one small swish. Will couldn't help but smile.

"From your reaction, I'd guess you've never done this before," Will said.

The wolf turned to look at him, those crimson eyes shining in the sunlight. He was once again struck with the knowledge that this wolf was a person. Hannibal Lecter.

"It has been quite some time since I have partaken in such simple pleasures as this," the wolf replied, "I had nearly forgotten what a pleasure it is."

Will huffed a laugh. He splashed his feet a bit in the water, smiling at the way it drew the wolf's attention.

"You've been so consumed by your anger and hate, that you forgot how to live," he said, "these are the moments that connect us to ourselves and our world. You have become disconnected."

The wolf considered that, splashing his own paws in the water experimentally. It was actually cute, like a dog playing in a puddle. Will hadn't expected a wolf that large to be able to look cute.

"Perhaps I have," the wolf agreed thoughtfully, "In which case, I have you to thank for bringing me back."

Will shrugged, looking back down at the water around his feet. A few small, silver fish darted around his toes.

Maybe something good would come of this after all. Maybe he would find he actually fit in with these wolves, when he had never fit with other people.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you're enjoying it. I have a lot of ideas for this fic, and I just have to learn Lithuanian fast enough to keep up. Fingers crossed.

5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Will woke this time, it was slowly and calmly. He couldn't ever remember not waking in a state of shock or panic. It was strange, and he blinked in the light of day.

Another thing was strange.

Hannibal Lecter was slumped forward in the chair he had set beside the bed, his head resting on top of his arms. One of his hands was resting beside Will's, so close that his small finger was brushing the skin of Will's hand.

Will pulled away reactively, then grimaced at himself as his movement woke the other man.

Hannibal sat up, wincing slightly as he stretched his back and Will heard it pop. He must have been sore from the position he had slept in. Will felt bad, feeling like Hannibal had done that for him.

"Labas rytas, širduk," Hannibal murmured, taking in a deep breath.

Will wasn't sure how to respond to that. He had the vague understanding that Hannibal had bid him good morning, but he didn't know how he was expected to respond. He hadn't learned a single word of the language yet.

He wondered how long it would take for him to pick it up. He was typically a quick study, but from what he could tell Lithuanian was a complex language, and he hadn't undertaken such a daunting task before.

Hannibal stood, looking down at Will thoughtfully.

"How did you sleep, Will?" he asked.

Will furrowed his brow. He wondered if Hannibal was asking if he remembered the dream, or if he was simply asking about Will's sleep. Again, he decided to let Hannibal ask for what he wanted rather than guess what was being asked.

"Actually, really well," he admitted, "after the first incident of the nightmare, I slept better than I have in years."

Hannibal looked pleased, and Will felt like he had a right to. It had probably been the tea that had helped Will, after all.

"I am glad of that," Hannibal said, walking to a mirror hanging on the wall, "you need not speak of your nightmare if you do not wish, but I will listen if you do."

Hannibal studied himself in the mirror, frowning at the red marks left on his face from his arm. Will hid a smile behind his hand, feeling like he was getting his first glimpse into the man's actual life. He was vain.

Hannibal turned back, and Will played it off as if he had been rubbing his face free of sleep.

"Now, I shall cook for you properly," Hannibal said, smiling and heading back towards the kitchen, "is there anything you do not eat?"

Will shrugged.

"Just other people," he said.

Hannibal smiled with a flash of teeth and was gone. Will wasn't sure exactly what to make of that, but he didn't think Hannibal had any people to try to feed to Will. Will had been meant for his table, in one way or another, after all. Until they found other prey, Will thought there would be little meat on the menu.

Will stood, realizing he was still wearing the clothing he had been left in. He had probably made Hannibal's bed dirty with sap, bark, and dirt as well as the blood he had smeared into it after the nightmare.

What a thoughtful guest he was being.

Will followed Hannibal into the kitchen after setting the bed to rights. At least as well as he could. Hannibal was already busy, heating the stove and mixing something together in a large bowl. Will could smell something sweet and spiced, like apple cider. It was like autumn, though it was nearly the middle of summer outside. It brought to mind his dream, how he had known it was autumn in that snapshot of a memory.

All at once, Will realized he was thirsty again.

"Um, could I have a glass of water or something?" he asked, feeling awkward and shy. He couldn't remember ever feeling so helpless.

Hannibal turned to him, smiling.

"Žinoma," he said, "Tai yra pirma pamoka. Kaip tai skamba?"

Will chewed on the inside of his cheek. He wasn't sure what was expected of him.

"Can you say that in English?" he asked.

Hannibal smiled and nodded.

"I said we can use this as our first lesson. Can you repeat 'ką reiška'?"

Will swallowed. For some reason, he was afraid to get it wrong. But he tried. He tried to copy the way Hannibal's tongue and lips shaped the sounds of the words. They felt strange, foreign in his mouth. He thought he would be able to get used to them, though. With practice.

Hannibal smiled and nodded.

“Practice that, because it will help you. It is how you ask what something means. You must say that, then repeat whatever confused you. If you do, I will translate for you,” Hannibal said, “now, to ask for a drink, you will say ‘ar aš turiu gerti?’. Do not worry too much over your pronunciation at first. It will come to you in time.”

Will took a deep breath, wishing he believed in a god so he could pray to them for help.

“Ar aš turiu gerti?” he hesitantly repeated.

Hannibal nodded in encouragement.

“Labai gerai,” he said, turning to the table with a cup in hand, “this is kvas. Pabandyk.”

Hannibal set the cup down and gestured to it. Will guessed he was telling him to try it. He lifted it slowly, looking at the liquid inside. As of yet, Hannibal hadn’t given him anything he didn’t like.

When Will tasted it, he smiled. It was almost like apple cider, as he had thought when he entered the kitchen. It was apple, but it was still new to him and a bit strange. He thought he could also taste honey and maybe other fruit. It was sweet and sour and refreshing.

“This is delicious,” he said, “What’s for breakfast?”

Hannibal didn’t turn to Will to answer, busy at the stove instead. The smells filling the kitchen were warm and sweet.

“Pancakes,” Hannibal replied casually, “though I will admit this is somewhat later than I usually eat breakfast. We shall have to adjust our sleep schedule after last night’s excitement.”

Will nodded, his brow furrowing at the easy way Hannibal referred to them as a unit. He hadn’t said “you and I will have to adjust our sleep schedules”, he had used “we”. As if they were connected, conjoined. Perhaps it was just due to their position, Will being essentially his charge. It still made Will wonder what his purpose was here. Why Hannibal had wanted him to be spared.

“What’s the plan for today?” Will asked, “after our late breakfast?”

Hannibal turned to Will with a plate in hand and a smile on his face. He set the plate on the table in front of Will, three pancakes drizzled in a golden liquid.

“I have some business to attend to, and you are welcome to accompany me. If you do not, I would recommend you remain inside my house. The others may not work very hard to make you comfortable here just yet.”

Will sipped his drink, thinking about what he would do. He wasn’t sure he much liked the idea of being ogled by Hannibal’s side all day, but if he stayed inside he thought he would go stir crazy.

“If you come with me, you will be invited to a lunch I promised to prepare,” Hannibal said.

Will realized Hannibal wanted him to come, then. For whatever reason, Hannibal wanted his company today.

Will took a bite of the pancakes and was decided.

“These are amazing,” he said, taking another bite faster than was strictly polite.

They tasted like apples, and were drizzled in honey rather than syrup. They were possibly the most delicious pancakes Will had ever eaten. If Hannibal’s cooking was this good, he absolutely wanted to be there for lunch.

“I guess I’m coming with you,” Will said after a few more bites, “I don’t think I’d like being cooped up all day.”

Hannibal nodded, and again he was pleased. Despite what Will had come to expect from people, Hannibal really did seem to like him at least for now.

Will was painfully aware how easily that could change. If he was slow or difficult to teach, or when his temper or his fear made him rude. He didn’t expect this tentative regard to last long.

But it was nice for now. To be wanted.

“Skamba blogai,” Hannibal said, “then eat up and we will be on our way.”

Will didn’t have to be told twice. There was also bacon with the pancakes, which was sweet and delicious and cooked to perfection. Wil had never been so well fed, or enjoyed eating as much as he did that morning.

Hannibal was much more reserved as he ate, but watched Will with clear and palpable satisfaction. Will wondered if all Hannibal’s guests were subject to such regard.

When they were finished, Will helped clean up, feeling like he had to start doing things for Hannibal in return or he’d go crazy. No one had ever done this much for him all at once, and he didn’t know how to react to it.

“When you greet people today, you should use the phrase “Laba Diena”,” Hannibal said as he donned his coat and fastened the belt around his waist just as it had been the night before, “we have stayed in until saying good morning is no longer appropriate. You will likely notice when they change to good evening. Let us see what you can pick up over the course of a day.”

Will swallowed, nervous already. He had learned a few words and phrases of other languages before, but this would be an entirely new challenge, and he wasn’t sure how well he would do.

Picking up on his nerves, Hannibal smiled reassuringly.

“Remember, you may ask me for help at any time,” he said.

Will nodded, taking a deep breath and steeling himself for whatever they were about to do.

He worried about how dirty he looked, and he ran a hand through his hair to put it in order. To his horror, he found some small leaves and bits of wood in it. That meant he had left bits of tree in Hannibal’s bed. He felt ashamed of himself all over again.

Hannibal didn’t seem to mind his appearance, just offered him a pair of soft leather boots and led him out into town.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for the encouraging words. I really do want to work on this fic more, so I'll try to focus on studying for the translations.

Side note: As Will learns Lithuanian, I'll translate what is said that he understands, so you aren't left in the dark. It's what I've been planning and I just wanted you to know that I'm not just going to leave half of the dialogue incomprehensible to you. If you're using google to translate the lithuanian already, just don't spoil it in the comments for anyone who isn't. Everything will be explained later.
Thank you <3

6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Their first stop was at a small, colorful house with rugs hanging outside. The patterns of the rugs were bright and fascinating, and Will had to stop himself from reaching out and running his hands over the stitches. They looked beautiful, and he imagined the rough weave under his fingers with a soft yearning. It would be so normal and pleasant to just allow himself that small touch.

“Sveiki,” Hannibal called at the door, “Mykolas, ar tu čia?”

A voice called from the back of the house in response. It was a deep, rough voice that actually reminded Will of a growl, though it sounded pleased.

“Taip! Daktare Lecter, ar galiu padeti?”

A man emerged from the back of the house, his eyes bright and curious. There were stains on his hands of different colors, and he was wearing an apron that had splashes of overlapping colors as well. He looked at Hannibal foremost, then let his gaze stray to Will with a raised eyebrow. His eyes were a dark shade of brown, not quite like Hannibal’s, but close. His hair was much darker than Hannibal’s though, and he had it pulled back out of his face.

Will got the sense he liked Hannibal, but had already made up his mind not to like Will.

“Will reikia nauja drabužiai. Ar tu turi kažkas tikti?” Hannibal said. It sounded like a question, and Will tried to note some key words to ask about later. He wasn’t sure he would remember them, especially if he didn’t get a chance before a lot more words were said.

The man looked at Will, and Will saw the clear flash of disdain as he did. Will wondered if he had been one of the wolves in the hunt the night before. He didn’t ask who Will was or where he had come from. Either he had been, or word had already gotten around. Will thought they were equally likely.

“Žinoma. Palaukite minutėlę.”

The man disappeared into the back of the house once more. Hannibal clasped his hands behind his back, content to wait for the man’s return.

“Uh, Hannibal,” Will said nervously, keeping his voice low because he wasn’t comfortable in this place, with the stranger just in the other room. Hannibal turned to him with a pleasantly expectant expression. “Ką reiška kažka tikti?”

Hannibal grinned, and Will thought he looked absolutely delighted that Will had remembered what he had been told, and deigned to use it.

“That particular little phrase means “something that will suit”,” he said, “I have requested some clothes for you. I intend to have some specially made, but for now you will have to make do with whatever Mykolas has already.”

Will nodded. That made sense, everything considered. Not only were his own clothes dirty from the entire ordeal the night before, but they were wildly out of place among the people in this village. He hoped having new clothes would make him feel more comfortable, rather than more awkward. Hopefully it would help make him feel like he fit in better.

Only time would tell.

Mykolas returned soon enough, a bundle in hand. His expression was dubious, as if he expected Will to be unable to even wear them properly. Will would have been offended, had he been somewhere more familiar. The truth was that he wasn’t at all sure he would be able to wear them, or learn the language, or the culture. He wasn’t sure this would work at all.

But his stubbornness pushed him forward, taking the offered clothes when Mykolas extended them to him.

“Labai ačiu,” Hannibal said, “tu buvai ten vakar, taip?”

Mykolas turned to Hannibal without giving Will more than a glance, as if Will wasn’t worth talking to. Will felt that was almost fair, since he didn’t speak the language.

Hannibal spoke english, though, so Will wondered if he was the only one, or the rest of them were just refusing to speak to Will in the language he understood. He felt Mykolas would do that, at least, but he would have to see if the others did as well.

“Taip taip. Aš buvau ten vakar, kai jį radai. Mėsa. Kodėl?”

Hannibal frowned at something the man had said. Will thought he knew which word it had been that triggered his displeasure, and he made note to ask Hannibal what it meant later. He hoped he would pick things up quicker as he learned, because he hated relying on Hannibal for every single conversation.

“Ne, Jis nera valgis. Ar galite ateiti pietūs?”

Mykolas bared his teeth, glancing at Will as if he meant to snarl at him. His teeth were sharp like a wolf, and Will felt a pang of fear at the sight. But it was only a moment before the man turned back to Hannibal with a disapproving shake of his head.

“Taip. Aš galiu eiti. Ar jis valgo žuvį?”

The question was paired with a nod towards Will, so it must have had something to do with him. Will was tired of trying to remember words from their conversation, and it was clear Hannibal was not pleased with Mykolas. Will wanted to leave. He thought Hannibal did, too.

“Taip. Viso gero, Mykolas.”

Hannibal turned and waved for Will to follow him out of the house. Mykolas called some kind of goodbye after them, but Will didn't hear it properly. He was too focused on not dropping any of the items in his arms. They walked for a few minutes in silence, Will wondering if Hannibal's irritation would be taken out on him.

Hannibal appeared tense, as if his upset refused to ease now they were no longer in Mykolas' presence. It made Will fear the strong muscles he knew were under those unfamiliar clothes, but he knew he wasn't the object of the unpleasant feelings, and Hannibal had given him only a few instructions that morning.

"Uh, Hannibal?" Will ventured, staring down at the colorful clothes in his arms, "ka reiška mėsa?"

Hannibal sighed softly and shook his head.

"It is our word for meat," he said, "Mykolas has yet to accept that I have no intention of serving you as lunch."

Will frowned.

The fact that Hannibal had been upset by it was a good sign for Will, but that Mykolas had asked at all meant he had reason to expect Hannibal to change his mind. That wasn't good.

"He called *me* meat," Will concluded, "what did you ask him?"

Hannibal hesitated for a moment before he answered.

"After I assured him you are not on the menu, I asked him if he will be able to attend lunch today."

Will nodded, unsure why that would be the natural continuation of the conversation. Unless Hannibal hadn't wanted him to be there, but that didn't seem exactly right.

"Alright. Ka reiška valgožuvi?" Will glanced up as he said the last part, and saw Hannibal's lips twitch up into a smile.

"Valgo žuvi," Hannibal corrected, spacing the words apart so Will understood they were separate, "Mykolas asked if you eat fish. When I spoke to the others last night, I told them I would cook fish today, so he was curious if you would be there. That was his reason for asking, as it's obvious you eat fish."

Will took a moment to understand what had just been said, and when he did, he felt his face heat with a blush.

"How is it obvious?" he asked, not sure what to think about all of this.

Hannibal stopped walking, blinked in surprise, and huffed a soft laugh.

"Forgive me, Will," he said, "I often forget what it is to be human, I am so much of a Vilkatas now. We can smell it on you, as it happens. Fish makes up a large part of your diet, so it is

incorporated into your natural scent."

Will's flush deepened, and he clutched the clothes closer to his chest. He looked down at the dirt path, unsure what he was meant to do in response to that.

"Oh," he said softly, feeling suddenly uncomfortable with this conversation, "I didn't realize."

Hannibal turned to Will as they resumed walking, and his voice was warm when he spoke again.

"I believe you catch the fish yourself," he said, "Which is a valuable skill to have. I will introduce you to the other fishermen."

Again, Will didn't know how he could possibly know that. Usually it was the other way around, and Will was the one who knew things about other people that he really oughtn't to. It was strange for him to be around anyone who could flip the tables on him like that, and it seemed like just about everyone here would be able to.

Will frowned down at the clothes as they walked, his gaze eventually straying to his bandaged hands. His eyes caught there, and he smiled when he realized.

"It was my hands," he said, looking up at Hannibal and not registering the non-sequitur of his words, "That's how you know I fish."

Hannibal's face lit with understanding, and he smiled.

"Taip," he said warmly, "very good. I knew I would not keep my advantage over you for long. You are incredibly clever, and I wondered only when you would catch up. I'm pleased you did."

Will couldn't help but reflect the man's smile back to him, pleased by the compliment as much as by his own work to catch up. He did usually think of himself as fairly intelligent, and it was hard for him to feel so far behind. To know he had caught up, at least in Hannibal's eyes, was good and validating. He would have to work hard to stay at level with him, but Will thought he could do it. He would, because he didn't really want to imagine failing.

Chapter End Notes

> Brought to tears by spending hours trying to translate a simple sentence, only to realize I had been using the wrong word all along? More likely than you think. T-T On the plus side, this fic actually requires me to edit, which I normally don't do at all. So there's that. I'm working on it, but this chapter literally had me in tears. Just be patient with me. <3

7

Chapter Summary

Will starts to meet people.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was a warm day, and Hannibal showed Will to a place along a stream where he could bathe. Will was nervous, but Hannibal smiled and said he would be nearby if anything happened, leaving Will relieved he wouldn't have to bathe under the man's supervision. He was not being treated as a captive.

Hannibal paced away into the trees, leaving Will to himself with the bundle of new clothes and the slow current of the stream.

The day was warm and the sun bright, but the water was as cold as newly melted snow. Will shivered and shuddered as he washed himself, careful to get his hair and face. The cold of the water soaked through his bandages despite his attempt to keep them as dry as possible, and the cold was soothing to his wounds. He thought the bruises would last a while, but he wouldn't have to keep them wrapped very long.

Then, something clicked, and Will made a note to ask Hannibal something else when he was done here.

When Will had finally cleaned himself to his own satisfaction, he began to dress.

The clothes were fairly straightforward. A tunic, trousers, coat. There was no belt like the one Hannibal wore to fasten his coat, but he guessed that would come when Mykolas made clothes that were specifically for Will. Will had to tie the trousers tight around his waist and it all hung off him a bit ill-fittingly. They were too large, but he supposed that was better than being too small, and they should only be temporary. He just hoped he wouldn't look too ridiculous. He wanted to at least start to fit in here.

Will donned the same pair of boots Hannibal had given him that morning and folded the other clothes as neatly as he could. He wasn't sure how he was expected to get Hannibal's attention now, but he knew he had good hearing.

"Hannibal?" Will called, only a bit louder than his speaking voice.

At once, Hannibal appeared between the trees, smiling and pleasant. He walked up and looked Will over appraisingly.

“They are not your size,” Hannibal said thoughtfully, tugging gently at the shoulders of Will’s coat, “But they will suffice until your own set are finished. How do you feel?”

Will chuffed and looked away, trying not to get caught staring. It was still strange for him to be touched and spoken to with such warmth and familiarity. He could feel something stirring in his chest that he didn’t want to trust just yet.

“Much better now that I’m clean,” he said, “and I remembered something I wanted to ask you. Mykolas called you something. It sounded like Doctor, and I was wondering. Are you a doctor?”

Hannibal laughed softly, his eyes shining. The sound was surprised and delighted, and Will knew he had gotten it right.

“Indeed I am,” Hannibal said, “and you are right. Daktare is our word for doctor. I’m impressed you caught that, though I should not be surprised. You will be fluent sooner than anyone expects.”

Will grinned, pleased despite the small nature of the victory. It hadn’t been all that impressive, but it was something. Hannibal’s faith in him, even as unfounded as it seemed, offered him reassurance as well.

“We should be on our way to lunch,” Hannibal said, making Will wince at the idea of being around so many other people, who probably didn’t like him, “Just remember what I have said, and do not hesitate to ask for help.”

Will nodded, though his stomach was twisting nervously.

“Taip,” he said, earning another bright smile from Hannibal.

—

“Laba Diena, Daktare Lecter,” a woman said, smiling brightly, “Kaip sekasi?”

Hannibal smiled.

“Laba diena, Emilija. Aš labai gerai. Kaip sekasi?”

The woman tossed her head in a way that reminded Will that these people were also wolves, the motion similar to one he had seen from dogs and wolves plenty. Her hair was long and light colored, her face pale and unblemished. While quite a few of the people in this town held a passing resemblance to each other, Will hadn’t seen anyone who looked as if they could be related to Hannibal. Hannibal had said his entire family was dead, and this fact supported that. Will wondered about him. He was clearly respected, but there was something about the way the others interacted with Hannibal that made it seem he didn’t entirely fit in.

Will would have to pay attention, and try to find a way to learn more.

“Aš labai gerai. Ar galiu paklausti, ar tu laimingas su tuo žmogumi? Kodėl tu tai paderei?” the woman asked, offering Will a small smile, though it was just short of truly friendly. Will

had an idea she was talking about him, confident he wouldn't understand and probably also dubious about him as a person.

Hannibal laughed, touching Will's shoulder lightly. It was the kind of gesture clearly meant to reassure Will, and Will appreciated it.

"Kodėl ne? Aš labai laimingas. Jis labai protingas, ir tu žinai. Aš jį myliu, ir jis mane mylės. Būk mandagus. Sakyk labas." Hannibal spoke with ease and surety, and the woman seemed assured just as Will did. She turned to Will, and this smile was much more genuine.

"Hello," she said hesitantly, her accent thick, "My name is Emilija. I am sorry that I do not speak English well. I am pleased to meet you."

Will smiled, feeling relief at hearing someone else speak English. He had been getting exhausted by trying to understand all the Lithuanian he had been trying to understand.

"I am more than pleased to meet you," he said, "I'm Will, and your English is very good. Not as good as Hannibal's, but plenty good enough to go by. I hope I can learn Lithuanian quickly so I won't be so lost all the time."

Emilija huffed a soft laugh, raising an eyebrow at Hannibal.

"Daktare Lecter is good man. He will teach you. He will take care of you," she said.

Will nodded.

Everyone here seemed to have a very high opinion of Hannibal, which was slightly intimidating. Will didn't understand the dynamic of their village yet, but he was starting to feel like Hannibal was as close to in charge as any of them came. While that offered Will some protection, it also put him in a place of scrutiny. Everyone was watching his every move.

"I don't know how I can ever repay him," Will said honestly, feeling his face heat with the knowledge that Hannibal was hearing him say it, "I've got nothing."

Emilija laughed and shook her head. She laid a hand on Will's arm, friendly and reassuring. It seemed everyone needed to reassure everyone else today.

"Brangusis, you will find a way. He likes you very much."

Hannibal cleared his throat, offering a pointed look to Emilija. She pulled her hand away, smiling conspiratorially at Will, and nodded her concession.

"Taip, taip. Tu toks rimtas, Daktare. Visada. Pavalgykime."

Hannibal smiled.

"Taip."

Hannibal took Will's arm gently and they walked over to where a cooking station had been set up. Probably exactly for this. Emilija waved to Will with a smile and headed off toward a group of people who were sorting through some bundles of plants. Will recognized them all as edible, herbs and vegetables. He guessed they were helping with the grand lunch Hannibal was supposed to serve them all.

There were only a few small groups of people in the large building so far, but Will guessed the rest of the village would show up soon.

"You know how to prepare a fish, yes?" Hannibal asked.

Will was jolted by the question, and he looked at Hannibal with wide, startled eyes.

"I can't cook nearly as well as you do, Hannibal, and I'm sure no one wants me to try. Not here."

Hannibal smiled.

"I will do all the cooking," he said, "I only ask if you know how to prepare the fish for me. I assume you do, as you are a fisherman. I am asking you to work alongside me."

Will blinked, coming to a stop in front of a table with several large fish laying out for him. He recognized the kind of fish, and the knife laying beside them was also something familiar to him. He didn't feel out of place right there, and he felt a sudden rush of confidence.

He could do this.

"Yes," Will said with a nod, "I can get them ready for you. You sure no one will be upset?"

Hannibal shook his head.

"Let them be upset," he said, "you are not asking anything of them. You are offering a service. It would be rude of them to object."

Will smiled.

Hannibal was right. All Will could do was try his best to fit in and be useful, and then it was on everyone else to accept him. With Hannibal's help, he could do this. He could find a place here. He just had to trust Hannibal and try.

"Alright," he said softly, mentally preparing himself for whatever might come, "where do we start?"

Hannibal smiled.

Chapter End Notes

Translating has gotten a lot easier recently, so hopefully I'll be able to update this more regularly. All I can say is it really does just take work and practice, kids. Don't give up when things are hard. All that motivational stuff.

That being said, if you're using google translate, you might not get the exact words, but I made sure the vibe should be the same. Because my translating is getting better, but google's sure ain't. So, just be aware of that.
(specifically, when words like yes and no (taip and ne) are repeated consecutively, they are just a stronger version of the word. Like, absolutely, or not at all. I think Google translates taip taip as "as well as" or something.)

8

Chapter Summary

Will gets a little freaked out. Understandably.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will was even more impressed by Hannibal, now. As he cooked, Hannibal was making a whole show of it. He was grinning and tossing things in the air, knives and vegetables spinning above his hands as if he could control them with magic. His every movement was as graceful as a swan's, and every person in the room was enchanted by him.

Will, himself, was feeling pretty good as well. He finally had some work he could actually do, and do well. He knew how to deal with fish, and it was rewarding to be a part of this. The smells that filled the entire building were delicious and magical, and everyone seemed to be in a good mood.

Emilija had brought over the sorted and washed vegetables and herbs, and Hannibal was making wonderful use of them. The air was filled with the scents of his amazing cooking.

Will was also getting a sense of the dynamic in the village, seeing people come and go while they talked and ate. Emilija was apparently very friendly with everyone, and flitted from one group to the other, always smiling. Mykolas had shown up, and he looked like he was trying to be included in conversations, but was having little success. From what Will could see, those who interacted with him tended to want to keep it short and polite. Even Emilija didn't stay near him long.

Will tried to listen to them all talk, wanting to pick up words to ask Hannibal about, or see if he could understand any and figure out what they were talking about. He heard words he recognized, but everyone spoke so fast he couldn't catch what sounds came after, and he wasn't sure he would be able to differentiate between words if he had. In all, his attempts to eavesdrop were falling short.

The children were fascinating to watch, as they didn't seem to care if they were in wolf form or human form. They played together as if both forms were equal and neither were strange. Will suppose, to them, neither were. He could hear their giggles, shrieks, and barks. Once, a child in wolf form began to howl, but an adult quickly hushed them, tapping their nose with one finger in a chiding motion. The child had huffed and shook their head, but had quieted down.

It was an amazing thing to see, the way they interacted with each other. They had a more cohesive and comfortable atmosphere than any village Will had ever visited. It was nice, and

something in his chest ached to fit in. He wanted this to be the first place to ever feel like home to him.

After a while of serving food as he cooked, Hannibal turned to Will with a smile.

“You are the subject of quite a bit of gossip,” he said, and he seemed pleased by it.

Will felt his face heat with a blush and he looked down at his hands. They were smeared with blood and scales from the fish. His bandages were stained with blood, and Will knew they would have to be replaced. He wasn’t sure why Hannibal would be happy that people were spreading rumors about Will, but at least Will didn’t have to worry about dealing with him when he was upset.

“What are they saying?” Will asked, because he was desperate to know.

Hannibal took the next fish from Will and began to season it. Will followed his movements with his eyes, his gaze eventually straying up to Hannibal’s face as he talked.

“Of course, they all say you are quite handsome,” Hannibal said, glancing at Will to catch his reaction, “and they liken you to a pup, with your large eyes and lost look, following wherever I lead.”

Will had to tear his eyes down from Hannibal’s face, knowing his own face had gone entirely red from the thought of all that attention being directed at him. He would never have expected them to think he was handsome, especially considering how commanding and powerful Hannibal was beside him. And though he made it sound like they were comparing him to a child, Hannibal hadn’t made it seem like they meant it as a bad thing. He was confused and slightly overwhelmed by it all.

“I feel like a little rowboat that got carried out to sea,” Will confessed, preparing the next fish for Hannibal, “No anchor, and the current is pulling me further out. Any progress I make is a fight against forces of nature.”

Hannibal stepped closer to Will, leaning in to speak lowly into his ear.

“Allow me to be your anchor,” he said, “I will not allow you to be lost, nor destroyed. If you will only attach yourself to me.”

Will huffed a laugh, shaking his head at the irony.

“We’re already tethered to each other,” he said, “Without you I’d be dead, and you’re risking your position by gambling on me. Now, it would be hard for us to survive separation, I think. One way or the other.”

Hannibal hummed, sounding amused as he pulled away to continue cooking. Will still couldn’t quite understand why he was doing any of these things, especially because it did seem to be affecting the way people saw him. Hannibal was an authority here, and he was betting all of that on Will’s ability to fit in.

Which Will was famously bad at.

Something occurred to Will, and he frowned.

Everyone called him Doctor Lecter. Will was the only one who called him Hannibal. Even Emilija, who seemed to be on good terms with him. She had called him by the honorific.

Hannibal had told Will to call him Hannibal. A privilege that was either rarely given, or rarely accepted.

Why?

Everything Hannibal did caused Will to wonder more desperately.

There was a commotion, and Will snapped his head up. Mykolas had collapsed, and a group of people had gathered around him to try to help. Voices called out for Hannibal. The town doctor.

Hannibal was there in a moment, far quicker than Will had realized he was. He knelt by the man who was writhing on the floor and gave a rapid set of instructions to a man with dark hair who nodded and immediately dashed away.

Will was frozen, watching in horror as people stepped away from Hannibal and the ailing man. Hannibal pulled Mykolas close and whispered something in his ear, then laid him on the ground flat as the man with the dark hair returned with what Will recognized as Hannibal's medical kit.

Mykolas stared up at Hannibal in horror, and Will had a sinking feeling he knew what Hannibal had said to him.

As Mykolas finally seemed to find some relief, Hannibal looked up and caught Will's gaze. Their eyes locked for a long moment, before Hannibal smiled and returned to caring for Mykolas.

Hannibal was even more dangerous than Will had realized.

What had he gotten himself into?

—

"Will."

Will startled, nearly cutting himself with the knife he was using to prepare the last fish. He looked up and met Hannibal's eyes, feeling a pang of fear as he remembered the way he had looked at Will over the writhing body of Mykolas.

Mykolas was fine, but had returned home to rest. Hannibal claimed he would recover in no time and be able to resume his usual duties.

Will wasn't sure what frightened him more. The idea that Hannibal might have tried to kill Mykolas, or the idea that he had meant him to live and know who had caused him such agony and fear.

Will thought Mykolas would certainly be dead if Hannibal had meant for him to die. And perhaps the only reason he hadn't is because Hannibal still had use of him. This was nothing more than a lesson.

But why?

"Are you alright, Will?" Hannibal asked, frowning with concern. Will couldn't tell if it was fake or not. "You look distressed and distracted."

Will swallowed and offered a wavering smile.

"I think I'm just tired," he said, afraid to say anything about what had happened, lest Hannibal decide Will was a risk to him, "It's exhausting to try to understand what people are saying when I don't have a chance."

Hannibal smiled, and he looked genuinely fond. Will didn't know if he could trust it, though.

"I understand. Would you prefer we take our food back to my home, so that we may eat without the pressure of so many eyes on you?" He asked.

Will hesitated only a moment.

If Hannibal meant to kill him, he could do it at any time. Will doubted anyone would even bother to object. They had all been pleased enough for him to be killed on the night of the sacrifice. Hannibal didn't need to get him alone.

And what other choice did he have?

Will nodded.

"That would be good," he agreed.

Hannibal smiled again and began packing a basket with what he would need to cook their dinner at his home. As he did, many people came over to speak with him. They seemed to be asking him why he was leaving already, and Hannibal didn't so much as gesture to Will. Will wondered if he was telling them it was because of him or not. From what he had gathered, Hannibal hadn't said a single bad thing about Will to any of them. He was sure he would find out once he learned the language better, but for now he would just have to trust Hannibal.

How could he trust Hannibal after what he suspected he had done to Mykolas?

Will found himself in a far more dangerous position than he thought he ever had been before. Even when he was being sacrificed to unknown monsters in the woods, he had not been so anxious. He had expected that to have a simple ending. This kind of situation could be extended indefinitely. If Hannibal wanted him to live, but be in pain, he could do it. Will could see the capability in him, and had seen just a glimpse of the true monster that lived under his skin when he had been tending Mykolas.

Will was most frightened by the fact that Hannibal had hurt one of his own. As protective of his village as Hannibal seemed to be, even the other Vilkatas were not invulnerable to his

displeasure. Will didn’t know what Mykolas had done to deserve this punishment, but he was horrified that Hannibal had done it at all.

“Viso gero,” Hannibal said to the last few people who had come to speak with him. He then turned to Will with a smile. As if nothing were wrong at all. As if there was no need to be afraid. “Are you ready, Will?”

Will nodded, feeling as if he couldn’t speak for the time being. He hoped that wouldn’t make Hannibal upset, and he hoped it wouldn’t last long. He was trying to learn a language, after all. Becoming mute would certainly be an obstacle in that endeavor.

Hannibal didn’t show any indication that he minded Will’s silence, just gathering his things and leading Will out of the building and toward his little house. They walked in silence down the road. It was a bit more quiet than Will had seen the village before, probably because almost everyone had gathered for Hannibal’s cooking and they were still there. It seemed nearly deserted.

At the door to the house, Will felt his tongue loosen, and he was compelled to speak.

“Why did you do that to Mykolas?”

Chapter End Notes

I probably won't be able to update this one again until January, just based on how things are going right now. I wanted to post this chapter, though. Things started getting exciting here.

9

Chapter Summary

Will confesses his fears, and Hannibal doesn't do a whole lot to settle them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal, rather than be upset at all by Will's question and accusation, looked pleased. He entered the house and set down his basket on the table.

"You should be more specific, Will," he said, "For all I know, you are asking me why I came to his aide when he fell ill."

Will huffed, putting the medical kit down on the table next to Hannibal's other things.

"You know very well what I mean, Hannibal," he said, "You did something to him that made him sick. Is it because he upset you?"

Hannibal smiled and met Will's eyes. Despite the smile on his lips, his eyes were cold and ruthless. They were the eyes of a wolf, and they betrayed how dangerous he really was.

"It is because he showed you immense disrespect," Hannibal said, "Even after I repeatedly assured him you are not a threat, and should be welcomed here, he continued to be hostile. He will not be a problem again."

Will scowled, setting his hands on the table.

"Hannibal, you can't do that. Are you going to punish anyone who doesn't like me? You'll tear your own village apart."

Hannibal's eyes flashed, and he leaned forward on his hands to mirror Will's posture. They were very close to each other, and Will could hear Hannibal's breathing.

"They are not required to like you," he said, "But Mykolas was already aware that I do not tolerate rudeness. I made my position quite clear when I spared your life. If they wish to keep me here, then they will accept your presence as well."

Will understood part of it, then. Hannibal wasn't risking his position as much as it had seemed. He was too valuable, and they wouldn't want him gone. He felt so secure and confident in his place here. That was why he had felt sure enough to poison Mykolas.

“Why?” Will demanded, angry he couldn’t understand all of it, “What is it about me that makes you put them in that position? What use could you possibly have for me?”

Hannibal grinned, and it showed all of his sharp teeth.

“Tu mano gimininga siela, Will,” he stated, “when you learn what that means, I will explain everything to you. For now, just know that I will not allow anything to happen to you.”

Though the words themself should have been reassuring, they sounded much more like a claim of ownership. As if Will was now Hannibal’s property.

And wasn’t that the truth? Will owed his life to Hannibal. They were bound to one another, in some way he didn’t fully understand yet, whether he liked it or not.

“How am I supposed to believe you aren’t going to poison me, the way you did Mykolas, the moment I upset you?” Will asked.

Hannibal pulled away slightly, considering that. He didn’t appear insulted, but rather amused Will had dared to ask. Will was getting tired of his amusement.

“That would be rather counterproductive to my goals,” he said calmly, “but by all means, refuse to ingest anything I offer. See if you can last long, with no one you trust.”

Will felt his heart stop in his chest.

Hannibal was right. Will didn’t trust anyone here, and he couldn’t exactly run away. He had an idea that would end one of two ways, and neither of them resulted in freedom. He was essentially a prisoner here.

“I didn’t ask you to do this,” Will objected, frustrated that he had ended up in this position, “I haven’t asked for a thing from you.”

Hannibal shook his head and began preparing the fish to cook.

“Then you can be sure that what I do for you is freely given,” he said calmly, “I do not give of myself thoughtlessly, Will. While I do not expect you to understand all of it yet, I do expect you to show courtesy. Unbind your wounds so I can look at them and redress them.”

With that command, Hannibal seemed to dismiss Will, turning away to work on the food.

Will was angry and frustrated, but he didn’t want to get in a fight with Hannibal. That wouldn’t get him what he wanted.

So Will sat in one of the chairs by the table and pulled off his boots. He hissed softly as he did, the motion calling attention to the pain he had been distracted from until now. The bandages had spots where the blood had soaked through, and it stung to remove the bindings.

They didn’t look bad, considering everything he had been through. That wasn’t to say they looked good. The boots had rubbed against them, even through the bandages, and they were

red and agitated. The air stung them, and Will huffed at the thought of having to deal with this until they healed.

Hannibal appeared at Will's side with a cup of tea, eyeing the wounds critically.

"Drink this," Hannibal said, "It will help with the pain. Let them air while we have our meal, and I will tend to them when we are done."

Will nodded, accepting the cup of warm liquid. He really didn't expect Hannibal to poison him. Though Hannibal easily could, and would know how to do it without killing him, it did seem like Hannibal wanted Will to like it here and learn to fit in. If Will was violently ill or in pain, and he was aware Hannibal had done it to him, he wasn't likely to keep trying. So Hannibal wouldn't do it unless Will gave him no other choice.

Will didn't think he would, but he couldn't be sure. Their argument just now proved he couldn't always control his temper. Especially when he was afraid.

But he was always afraid. That was the hell of it.

The tea was bitter, but had obviously been sweetened with honey. Will thought it must be willow bark, and that made sense.

Though Hannibal came from far away, he had evidently familiarized himself with the local plant species. He had to know this kind of thing in order to be a doctor. And to poison those who upset him. Will knew just enough to get by, because he usually had to take care of himself.

After a few sips of the tea, Wills et the cup on the table and got to work unbinding his hands. The wrappings there had been soaked in the stream water, and then in the blood from the fish. They looked older than the bindings from his feet, though they had been applied at the same time. The skin underneath was stained pink, and was wrinkled from the continuous damp.

The cuts here looked dramatically deep, but none were bleeding. Despite the fact Will had been using his hands all day, he had managed not to make it worse.

Soon enough, Hannibal sat some food down in front of Will, taking his own seat across the table. Again, he viewed Will's injuries appraisingly, but made no comment.

"Thank you," Will said quietly, feeling ashamed of himself despite everything, "For everything you're doing for me. I don't mean to be ungrateful."

Hannibal smiled, and his eyes were sparkling with amusement. He was pleased.

"You are going through a very stressful time," he said, "and after today you must be fatigued. Such conditions promote absolute honesty, as blunt and unpleasant as it may be. I am sorry to have frightened you."

That surprised Will. He had thought Hannibal had meant to scare him, by letting it be so clear what he had done and why. Even if that was not true, Hannibal had not shown any regret or shame for his actions, so to hear him apologize was unexpected.

Will sighed.

“You didn’t really frighten me,” he admitted, “I’m just frustrated because there’s so much I don’t know, and I’m confused. I know I’m on borrowed time, and it’s hard to accept that I have no control over what happens now.”

Hannibal chewed a bite of his food thoughtfully. He seemed to genuinely be considering Will’s point of view, and again Will felt ashamed for losing his temper. It was clear Hannibal actually was trying to make this work, even if Will didn’t understand why.

“I believe you have more control than you think, Will,” Hannibal said at length, “and I have every faith that you will find ways to gain more. You are clever, and you feel you are in a difficult position. The perfect conditions for invention.”

Will frowned.

“Wouldn’t it benefit you if I don’t get control?” he asked, “You could keep me here and not worry that I might betray you, if there is no way I can.”

Hannibal huffed a laugh.

“If I exerted every ounce of effort, I do not think I could stop you if you truly meant to betray me,” he said, “And I would not want to. I will give you every resource I can so that you may act as you wish. I will not make your decisions for you. You are your own master, Will.”

Will looked down at his food with a deep frown.

“It sure doesn’t feel like it,” he said softly.

Chapter End Notes

Happy New Year to those who care! Personally, could have got a better start, but it could have been much worse. If nothing else, I've got a couple fics to update and a whole list of ideas to write. Last year I started off with no more than 98 WIPs, but this year I have a nice round 121. That's called growth.

See you soon for the next chapter. It's a fun one.

10

Chapter Summary

gasp there was only one bed!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal said a bed was being made for Will, and should be done the next day. For tonight, he insisted Will take the bed again and he would do without. Will felt a bit bad about it, but he also recognized that Hannibal had an advantage. It was much easier to get comfortable without a bed if you were a dog or a wolf.

“Would you like me to stay beside you until you fall asleep?” Hannibal asked as he finished wrapping Will’s hands again, “I can tell you another story, if you like.”

Will hesitated.

Despite himself, he found Hannibal’s voice very soothing, and he knew it would help him fall asleep. But it felt dangerous to let Hannibal get so close to him in that way, speak to him while he was vulnerable.

There might be something he could do that would help Will sleep, endear him to Hannibal, and keep Hannibal from talking to him all night.

“If you shift, I wouldn’t be uncomfortable if you shared the bed with me,” he said, his head down and his face heating, “I used to have dogs, and I slept better with them.”

Will kept his eyes down at their hands, not wanting to see the insult in Hannibal’s face at the comparison. He had no doubt Hannibal considered himself better than a dog, and would be offended. Still, Will didn’t know how Hannibal would answer.

“If it would help you sleep, I would be happy to,” Hannibal said calmly, “Though I worry it will not be comfortable for you, as the bed is rather small.”

Will smiled softly and shook his head.

“My old bed was smaller, and I had four dogs. I think it’ll be fine, if you’re alright with it.”

Hannibal hummed softly, just holding Will’s hands in his. Will felt a terrible conflict in his chest, wanting to feel safe and happy here, but knowing that would be foolish. He was literally in the den of a predator, and was lucky the beast wasn’t hungry. Things could change at any moment.

“Very well,” Hannibal said, “If nothing else, it will spare my back from that uncomfortable position of last night.”

Will swallowed, feeling awkward about having put Hannibal in that position. Though, really, it was true Will hadn’t done it. Hannibal had put them here. Will still felt responsible.

Hannibal cleaned up his supplies and readied for bed as Will lay down and moved toward the wall to make room for Hannibal beside him.

Hannibal padded into the room in his wolf form, moving slowly, probably to keep from frightening Will. Even though he didn’t have to, he kept doing things to make Will more comfortable. Will didn’t understand why.

Hannibal reached the bed, and put his front paws up next to Will on the bed. There, he stopped and tipped his head, waiting.

He was asking permission. For his own bed.

Will nodded, and Hannibal lifted himself up onto the bed, settling in beside Will. His fur was soft and his body was warm next to Will. They only just fit next to each other, and Will knew he would probably end up curling into that warmth during the night. He didn’t think Hannibal would mind, but he didn’t know if he wanted it to happen. It was too late to go back now.

“I don’t know what you want from me, but I really am grateful to you,” Will whispered, seeing the wolf’s ears twitch at the sound, “I’ll probably fight you more, because I don’t like not knowing things, but I need you to know it’s not because I’m ungrateful.”

The wolf made a soft grumbling sound and turned to nuzzle at Will’s face. Will couldn’t help but smile. He was a lot more comfortable talking to Hannibal this way. He had always liked dogs more than people.

Will closed his eyes and pressed his face into the soft fur of the wolf’s neck. He was already starting to drift off, the weight of the day falling on him and pulling him under.

—

“You truly feel safest in the wilderness.”

Will turned and saw the wolf again. He was dreaming, because the wolf was speaking with Hannibal’s voice. They were walking down a wooded path, the dappled light catching the wolf’s eyes and making them spark red.

“Yeah,” Will said, “I grew up wild, according to people from the towns. My daddy and I never settled down, so I spent most of my time between towns, in places like this. I felt safer here. More at peace.”

The wolf nodded, looking all around as if this place was new, and unfamiliar. Again, Will wondered if this was really Hannibal, somehow having entered his dream.

“You were raised to appreciate freedom of choice, and the moments of calm. So many these days feel they can never rest, or else they are not worth the life they are given.”

Will smiled and stopped walking, tilting his head up to the canopy above. He closed his eyes and let the lights dance across his eyelids like the sparks of a fire. He took in a deep breath that smelled of fresh earth and green plants.

“That’s why I never fit in with any of the towns, and they tried to get rid of me,” he said, “I like honest work just fine, but I don’t work myself to the bone if I don’t have to. I always take time to rest myself and enjoy the earth.”

The wolf laughed softly, and Will opened his eyes to look at him. The wolf was watching Will with a wide canine grin, his tail swishing back and forth. In some ways, Hannibal was easier to understand in this form. He seemed more capable of deception when he wore his human face.

“I think you will find you belong here,” the wolf said, “With me. We do not expect anything more than you can give.”

Will huffed and shrugged, beginning to walk again.

“Everyone seems pretty happy and comfortable,” he agreed, “at least for the most part. I imagine at least one person is going to be a bit on edge for a while, especially around you.”

The wolf chuffed and shook its head.

“I have no regrets,” he said.

Will nodded. He knew that, though he wasn’t sure what he was supposed to say about it. This was a dream and he didn’t even know if the wolf was really Hannibal, or just his mind’s caricature of him.

“I can’t help but feel like you would have let him be rude if it wasn’t to me,” Will confessed, “But I still don’t understand why you seem to like me. I haven’t given you any reason to, but it feels like you hurt him for me.”

The wolf was silent for a moment, and Will wondered if it was because he didn’t know how Hannibal would respond to hearing him say that.

“How does it feel when you think that?” the wolf asked eventually.

Will sighed. He pictured Mykolas, writhing on the ground, Hannibal standing over him with a smile. Then, as if out of his control, the image changed in a flash. Mykolas was dead, his bowels strewn about, and Hannibal was covered in his blood. Hannibal still smiled at Will, and his teeth were stained red.

Will shook the image away, his heart beating fast in his chest. He felt guilty as he opened his mouth to speak.

“Cherished,” he admitted, “like for the first time in a long time, someone is going to protect me.”

Will would have been embarrassed to admit it under normal circumstances. Here, though. There was something about it being a dream, and Hannibal being a wolf rather than a person. It made it easy to confess to things that would horrify anyone in their right mind.

The wolf moved close, pressing to Will’s side in a comforting way. Will allowed his hand to run through the fur along the wolf’s back.

“I want you to feel safe here, Will,” the wolf said, “With me.”

Will huffed a laugh.

“Yeah, well you’re doing one hell of a job,” he said, “nearly killing one of your own friends right in front of me on a whim. No offense, but you could be trying harder.”

The wolf chuffed again, a laugh.

“I will not put on a false face,” he said, “I am always true to myself, and I won’t hide. If you are to stay here, you will get used to it.”

Will frowned and pulled his hand away.

“I don’t have much of a choice,” he said, “there’s nowhere for me to go. I outran you once, but I don’t expect to do it again. Even if you promise not to hunt me down, you can’t speak for the rest of them.”

Will crossed his arms over his chest and hugged himself, upset at the idea of being hunted again.

“I would not allow it,” the wolf stated, as if he could actually be sure of such a thing.

Will huffed a bitter laugh.

“Sure. One guy against the entire village. They were upset with you the first time. I don’t think they’ll let you get away with it again.”

The wolf pulled his lips back in a snarl, but not at Will.

“We are not monsters, Will,” he said defensively.

Will shrugged.

“Maybe not. It doesn’t really matter. You all have every reason to not let me go. What if I went to a town and told everyone about you? What if I sent a mob after you, and they tried to burn the village to the ground? What if they did? You can’t afford the risk. Don’t pretend you can.”

The wolf looked up at Will, his head tilted.

“You wouldn’t.”

Will shook his head, thinking of the children he had seen during the lunch. How they had laughed and played with each other. He wouldn’t. He would never want these people to be hurt again as they had been. They had finally found some semblance of peace here, and he wouldn’t be the one to destroy it. Even if they were the monsters the children back home were told of to keep them obedient.

“No,” Will agreed, “I wouldn’t. But that doesn’t matter. It’s a risk none of you can take. I understand that, and I don’t hold it against you. It just means I have limited options.”

The wolf huffed softly, clearly displeased. Will was amused by that, and he couldn’t help but smile a bit. For a monster of children’s stories, this particular wolf was sensitive and gentle most of the time. He did not change with the rising of the moon, but it seemed rather that he was ruled by the dark that would rise in his mind and compel him to be cruel.

“I would have you be free to do as you wish,” the wolf said after a pause, “I do not want you to be a prisoner, nor feel you are one. I respect you far too much to wish that.”

Will raised an eyebrow.

“If this is a dream, and you aren’t really here, then my mind is creating a much softer version of you for me to digest,” he said, “maybe this is my mind’s way of compensating for all the fear I feel while I’m awake right now. If I were to believe you’re really here, it would make me less afraid of you while I’m awake.”

The wolf was silent for a long moment. Will hoped he wasn’t upset, but at the same time he doubted it would matter. This was probably just a dream, after all. If Hannibal wanted to perpetuate that illusion, he couldn’t break it. If it wasn’t.

“You are not sure if this is real, yet you have not asked me, here or otherwise.”

The wolf was looking at Will curiously, waiting for him to respond. Will sighed softly.

“I’ve always been able to have this place to myself,” he said, “My head. My dreams. If you found a way in, that will probably make me more nervous all the time. If you are really here, I’m not sure I want to know. I’m comfortable with you here, and I don’t want that to change. If you have no plans to tell me, then I have no plans to ask.”

The wolf huffed softly, almost as if disappointed. Will wondered about it, but didn’t ask.

“So far, the dreams with you have been better than I’m used to,” Will said, “I usually have nightmares all night. You bring safe places with you. I don’t want to go back.”

The wolf nuzzled at Will’s chest, seeming pleased and placated by Will’s words. Will wished everything in life was that easy. Just telling the truth and having things get better because of it. That would have solved a lot of problems in his life, personally.

“I would like to be a source of comfort and safety for you, Will,” The wolf said.

Will nodded.

“I know.”

Chapter End Notes

Entirely self-indulgent this chapter *^^* Because I can. Next chapter should give us another glimpse of what life in the village is like on regular days, and how things are going to go between Hannibal and Will during times of peace. Also, it will include more lithuanian, meaning I don't know when I'll finish the translations. Such is life.

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